

Feeding and Watering Your Horse

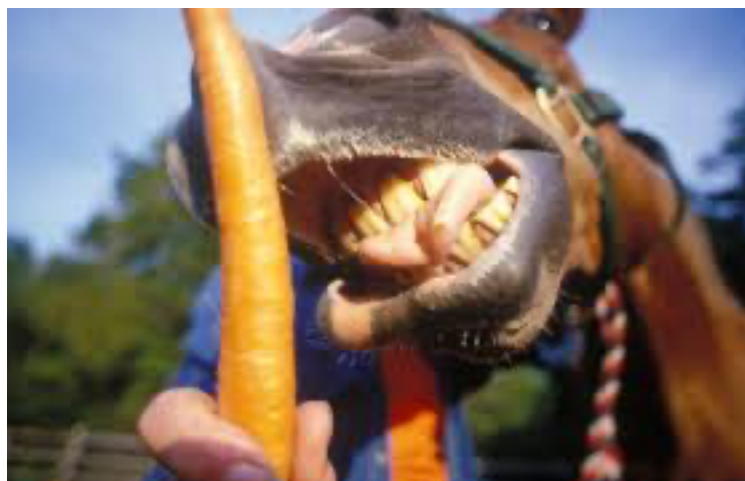
Did you know that horses are natural trickle feeders? They spend an impressive 14 to 20 hours a day happily browsing and grazing on a fibre-rich diet. Imagine them wandering through lush fields, munching on a delightful mix of grasses, herbs, and even the occasional weed. Their natural diet is like a buffet of varying grasses, from fresh shoots to those hearty, older stalks. For most horses, especially those kept in fields, old pasture is perfect, with just a bit of supplementary hay needed during the chilly winter months. And let's not forget: horses should always have access to clean, fresh water!

What Should You Feed Your Horse?



To keep your horse healthy and happy, it's essential to feed them a diet that closely resembles what they'd naturally eat. This means a high-fibre, low-sugar diet that allows for grazing on various grasses, herbs, and even safe hedgerows. Such a diet not only provides the nutrition they need but also satisfies their instinct to forage. This helps keep boredom at bay and can even prevent common issues like stomach ulcers and colic.

Quick Note: It's a myth that certain breeds, like cobs, can carry more weight. Excess fat is a health risk for any horse, regardless of breed. Aim for a healthy body score between two and three and a half.



When to Consider Supplementary Feed

When deciding how to feed your horse, think about their grazing conditions. Grass is often overlooked, but it forms the backbone of most horses' diets. Whether it's fresh from the pasture or conserved as hay, grass provides essential energy and nutrients.

You'll only need to consider supplementary feed if your horse is underweight, elderly, working hard, or if you're managing breeding stock.

Another Note: In modern pastures, the variety of natural grasses is often replaced by a few nutrient-rich types, so keep that in mind!



Types of Supplementary Horse Feed

1. Fibre and Roughage:

Fibre is crucial for your horse's digestion. Grass should be the primary source, especially when it's in season. As the grass matures, its fibre content increases. During winter, you might need to supplement their diet with hay or haylage to ensure they still get enough fibre.

2. Concentrates (Hard Feed):

Concentrates are foods packed with nutrients and energy but should only make up a small part of your horse's diet. This portion will depend on your horse's overall condition and level of activity.

3. Cereal and Grains:

Cereals like oats and barley are often rolled or bruised to enhance digestibility. They're high in energy, making them great for horses that work hard but unsuitable for those in light work.

4. Compound Feeds:

These come as pellets or mixes and contain a variety of ingredients to meet specific needs. They can be tailored for different types of horses, from competitors to seniors.

5. Succulents:

Think soaked sugar-beet pulp, apples, and carrots! These are tasty and can provide extra vitamins and minerals. While grass usually covers their needs, a little extra succulence can be beneficial.

during winter or if grazing is limited. Just remember, never feed grass clippings—they can be toxic!

6. Supplements and Feed Balancers:

If your horse needs it, you can add supplements to their diet for extra vitamins, minerals, or digestive support. Older horses or those on restricted diets may benefit greatly from these. Just check with your vet or an equine nutritionist before diving in.

Important Reminder: Always make any changes to your horse's diet gradually. Sudden shifts can upset their gut bacteria and lead to colic.

Water: A Crucial Component



Horses need a good amount of water—around 25 to 55 litres a day, depending on the weather, diet, and activity level. Always provide them with fresh, clean water to prevent dehydration.

Water in the Field:

You can set up a self-filling trough made of galvanised iron or reinforced plastic, or just use large buckets. Make sure to check and clean them regularly—scrubbing out algae in the summer and breaking ice in the winter.



Water in the Stable:

Always keep at least one bucket of fresh water in the stable. Use plastic or rubber buckets to avoid injuries and consider placing them in old tires to prevent spills. Remember to change the water daily; it absorbs ammonia from the stable, which can deter some horses from drinking.

Rules for Feeding and Watering Horses

- **Stick to a Fibre-Based Diet:** Only add hard feeds if absolutely necessary.
- **Feed According to Needs:** Pay attention to age, type, and workload to prevent overfeeding or underfeeding.
- **Feed Little and Often:** Horses are designed to graze small amounts throughout the day, so break their meals into smaller portions.
- **Store Feed Properly:** Keep feed in vermin-proof containers to maintain quality.
- **Keep Feeding Equipment Clean:** Wash feed bowls and equipment after each use.
- **Always Provide Fresh Water:** Horses need access to clean water, whether in the field or the stable.
- **Make Changes Gradually:** Sudden dietary changes can upset their digestive system.
- **Maintain a Consistent Routine:** Horses thrive on routine, so try to feed them at the same times each day.
- **Use Quality Feed:** Ensure the food is fresh and safe for your horse's health.
- **Wait Before Riding:** Leave at least an hour after feeding before you ride to allow for digestion.
- **Offer Succulents Daily:** Especially during winter or if grazing is limited, add treats like apples or carrots to their diet.



By following these guidelines, you'll be well on your way to keeping your horse healthy, happy, and well-nourished!